

*Watch Hill Fire District
Watch Hill, R.I. 02891*

DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETING

Friday, September 25, 2015

4:00 p.m.

Fire Station

222 Watch Hill Road

Watch Hill, RI

A meeting of the District Council of the Watch Hill Fire District was held at the Watch Hill Fire Station at 4:00 p.m. Friday, September 25, 2015.

The following members were present:

Charles S. Whitman III, Moderator
John M. Regan III, Deputy Moderator
Robert Murray, Treasurer
Paul Verbinnen, Finance Committee Chairman
Robert Peacock, Fire Chief
William J. Miller, Jr., Member at Large

By Phone for part of the meeting:

Elizabeth Bean, Park Commission
Jeanne Blasberg, Park Commission
Dabney Pierce, Park Commission

Also present were:

Judy Kelley, Fire District Office Manager

Proper notice having been given and a quorum being present, the Moderator, Charles S. Whitman III, called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Minutes

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes of the meeting of June 12, 2015, which were previously circulated, were approved.

Finance Committee – Mr. Paul Verbinnen

Mr. Verbinnen reported that while it was still early in the fiscal year, everything seems to be on track. He then reported that the Fire District had reached a settlement with a delinquent taxpayer on back taxes of just over \$4,000. Mr. Verbinnen noted that the Fire District agreed to waive interest charges. Mr. Verbinnen also advised that the Fire District had paid to have the abandoned, burned boat removed from Napatree. The funds were captured under the Fort Road Repair budget, but there is \$6,000 set aside for unpaid taxes which had included a provision for the amount just settled, so it may be that this will offset the boat removal expense.

Mr. Verbinnen reported that Mr. Jef McGill has resigned from the Finance Committee, noting other commitments. There are no plans to replace him in the current fiscal year.

Treasurer – Mr. Robert Murray

Mr. Murray reported that the Fire District received a check for \$145,000 at the end of August from the Larkin parking lot operation, which is more than they received last August (\$138,000). Mr. Murray said the income from the parking lot has been trailing last year's returns but Mr. Simmons is confident that the lot will meet its budget. One more check is due by the end of the year.

Mr. Murray said the cash balance was fine but significantly down from last year at this time, primarily due to the fact that significantly higher tax payments were received last year by the end of August (\$225,000) than was the case this year (\$65,000). Since taxes are not due until September 30, there is no reason to believe there is any problem.

Mr. Murray explained that he has been working with DiSanto Priest on state reporting requirements. The Fire District has been sending in quarterly reports that are abbreviated financial summaries and comparisons to budget. There is also now an annual yearend report that is very extensive and goes beyond financials into personnel, etc. We have until the end of November to file this report. As part of this reporting, the state is asking for a balance sheet according to GAAP standards. To create that, the Fire District needs to determine the original cost of all its properties. Judy Kelley has been working with the Tax Assessor's office to find these costs and has found that there is no way to clearly determine what they are. It is even difficult to get the assessed value at the time of transfer as there are no plat/lots in the documents and properties have been combined and /or subdivided. There was discussion concerning using the current assessed values of the land, which are public records but not available in an aggregated list. Mr. Regan suggested that even if the Fire District chose not to use current values, they are available and the District Council should have a position on why the Fire District holds such properties. The response was that these properties are income producing, therefore holding down taxes, and that they protect the shoreline. Mr. Murray stated he will have a conference call with DiSanto Priest and Judy to determine where to go from here.

Park Commission – Mrs. Elizabeth Bean/ Mr. Charles S. Whitman III

Mr. Simmons was traveling and Mrs. Bean was to report by phone but the conference connection was lost. Therefore Mr. Whitman gave a brief update. He noted the removal of the boat from Napatree, which was discussed earlier. He said there will be some legal expenses associated with the removal as well. It was also noted that Mr. Simmons will be meeting with a contractor this Friday to determine how much remediation work can be done on the bathhouses within the approved budget figure. Mr. Murray noted that Mr. Simmons has been working closely with Mr. Horne to be certain the Park Commission stays within its budget.

Fire Department – Chief Robert Peacock

Chief Peacock reported that there have been four boating interventions since the last meeting. The most recent involved the death of a local fisherman when a 60 foot yacht hit the fisherman's boat, which capsized. The accident is under investigation by the DEM and police. The pilots of the yacht were detained and questioned and the boat impounded. Chief Peacock said that the Fire District boat would have been the first on the scene but it is not achieving full power for some reason and hence was passed by the Coast Guard vessel which had already been underway on another mission and was diverted to this call. Mr. Regan said the Board of Engineers was renewing their appeal for a new boat. There was an offer of a donation but that boat was not suitable. Chief Peacock said the existing boat may not be worth fixing. When the season is over (Columbus Day), the boat will be hauled out and the engine will be checked to determine the problem. It was also noted that the Fire Department currently has two boats, but the whaler cannot go into the open ocean. In the long run, the department will consolidate to one good boat. It is estimated that a new boat will cost between \$125,000 and \$150,000. It is one of two capital expenditure priorities the Fire Department has submitted to the Long Range Planning Committee. The other is a new, wireless alarm system. The cost for that project is in the same range as for the new boat and is necessary because of the poor condition of the wiring and receiving equipment for the current system.

Chief Peacock reported that the Fire Department has just joined the Narragansett Bay Marine Task Force, which is like a mutual aid group for boat issues and which covers territory from Providence to Westerly.

Chief Peacock said there have been a series of false alarms in the last 10 days but even more surprising were the two double calls, which is highly unusual. To have a false alarm while a real emergency is pending would be troubling. It was felt that this issue might be addressed at the next annual meeting, advising people whose home alarms go off but who do not require help to call 911 to advise that the trucks do not need to come. It was also suggested that renters and even owners may not realize that their alarm systems are tied to the Firehouse.

Chief Peacock reported that the department was holding its own with volunteers. They got 6 new members over the summer, 2 of whom were summer residents and have now left. He stated that the Fire Department was working more closely with Misquamicut on mutual aid as Watch Hill has a ladder truck which Misquamicut does not have and Misquamicut has more volunteers, particularly during the day. The lack of housing in Watch Hill for the volunteers is a fundamental problem in recruiting.

Finally, Chief Peacock reported that he may go a bit over budget on Maintenance and Operations due to unexpected expenses related to one of the trucks as well as repairs to the boat and its engine.

New Business, Mr. Charles S. Whitman III

Mr. Whitman reported that the Improvement Society was considering moving the statue of Chief Ninigret at their expense. They would like to have him face the sea and perhaps move him closer to the District Parking lot, where there is more activity. They are currently seeking permission to have Cherenzia lift the statue so they can see if there is plumbing under it. The two fishes on the statue are fountains and the Improvement Society would like to have those functioning again. It was the consensus of the District Council to allow the Improvement Society to go ahead with Cherenzia but not to do anything further until a full proposal was presented and approved by the Park Commission and then the District Council.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:10 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Kelley
Office Manager